



# MONTANA ARTS COUNCIL

Strengthening the Creative Economy of Montana

*Readers please note that all links are underlined and in blue—to access a Master List of all links click [here](#).*

## A. OVERVIEW [Montana Arts Council's Enabling Legislation](#)

### Major Developments or Conditions

When people think about the state of Montana, their imaginations spark with visions of “Big Sky Country” and “The Last Best Place.” The Montana Arts Council (MAC) also works hard to build a brand where Montana is known, far and wide, as “The Land of Creativity.”

Big Sky Country is just that ... big! It spans nearly 700 miles east to west and 300 miles north to south. It takes 10 hours to drive across Montana non-stop at 70 m.p.h. To place it in a geographic context, were its northwest corner placed in Chicago, the southeast corner would stretch all the way to Washington, D.C!

**Montana's population density** averages 6.8 persons per square mile, with just over a million people total. Ninety-five percent of Montana towns have less than 5,000 residents, and only seven cities have more than 10,000. Billings is the largest city at 107,000 residents. *As a Montana rancher says, “Come on over for a visit, I'm 30 miles west of town. It's the second left.”* Yet the term “rural” doesn't fully depict the vast remoteness of much of the state. Forty-five of Montana's 56 counties are classified as “**frontier**” by the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, having less than six people per square mile.



**Montana boasts an incredible arts community.** One out of every 60 people in the state's labor force is a working artist. Based on the last formal research the agency conducted, artists produced an economic impact of close to one-quarter of a billion dollars per year. The number of artists grew three times as fast as the rest of the state's labor force between 1970 and 2010. There are also over 400 nonprofit arts organizations in the state and hundreds of galleries and private-sector arts businesses. See economic studies [here](#).

**Montana's education environment.** Montana's Board of Public Education just adopted accreditation standards in the arts, to begin in 2017. Last updated in 1999, the standards now include the five artistic disciplines of media arts (film, animation, and digital art), visual arts, dance, theatre and music. The revised arts standards also integrate Montana's Indian Education for All. See new arts standards [here](#).

The new arts standards are the fruit of careful and deliberate relationship building between MAC, the Montana Office of Public Instruction's (OPI) Content Standards and Instruction Division and Office of Indian Education. Another exciting outcome of the MAC/OPI partnership is Montana Teacher Leaders in the Arts (MTLA), a program that is creating a statewide network of coaches, mentors and advocates for arts learning in K-12 schools. In September 2016, MAC and OPI will also co-host the first Montana Arts Education Leadership Summit. The MAC and OPI partnership supports a shared goal of providing more equitable access to arts learning in Montana schools.

Montana's rural population means that 54% of Montana schools have fewer than 100 students. In fact, there are several counties with only one school in the entire county! According to OPI, one-third of all Montana schools are in the Title I Schoolwide Program, having been established as high-poverty.

**Montanans are aging.** One out of five Montanans is over 60. In 2025, Montana will rank as the fifth oldest state per capita in the country.

**Our personal economies.** Montanans living below the national poverty level comprise 15.3% of the population. Montana is ranked 38<sup>th</sup> in the nation for household income, with a median income per household of \$46,230 (US is \$53,657). Montana's unemployment rate is 4.2% compared to the US - 5.5%. Within Montana's seven Indian Reservations the statistics are much different: the average household income is half of the state's average, and the unemployment rate is more than double.

**Montana's economy is bolstered by extractive industries (coal, oil and gas), tourism, farming and ranching.** Revenues from taxes on these industries, as well as a fiscally conservative state budget, have meant the state operates with a budget in the black. Montana produces 25% of all barley in the country (used for beer) and 10% of all wheat in the U.S. (used for flour and bread). And how 'bout them cows? There are 2½ times the number of cattle as people in Big Sky Country!

**Politically, Montana is conservative.** The legislature remains very much so, with a steadfast number of libertarian/constitutionalist legislators. Political priorities emphasize economic development and education funding. These are echoed in MAC's Operating Framework (the name we use for our "strategic plan").

**The rural character of Montana** creates citizens who experience and understand the fundamental link between community culture and civic pride. With few resources, Montanans are remarkable in the ways they form unique bonds through their communities' cultural roots. Despite the sprawling geography, Montanans are close-knit socially. In many ways, Montana feels like one big town. This creates an environment of neighborliness. From a shared sense of isolation, people work hard for the common good and take great pride in their own communities. This results in a sense of place and partnership that is uniquely Montanan.

**How we define "Underserved."** Our underserved communities are, in fact, the majority of Montanans. This is not an oversimplification of the concept of "underserved." A large percentage of Montana school kids have a bus ride of 30 miles or more, and the average Montanan thinks nothing of driving 90 miles one way to have dinner or see a show. Hence, the average Montanan *is* our geographically underserved constituency. MAC considers as "underserved" those individuals living in rural Montana outside of the seven largest towns (about half of all Montanans); members of the 11 Indian tribes living on Montana's seven Reservations; low-income communities within the seven largest cities; children; people living with disabilities; and any ethnic-based community of people who share a common cultural/ regional/occupational heritage.

**Our placement in government** MAC is attached to the Board of Education for administrative purposes, and operates as an independent state agency. The agency website is located [here](#).

### **B.1. Quality of the Planning Process: *The Most Recent Process***

Over a decade ago, MAC began strategic work to aim the agency's lens outward to show the arts' benefit to Montana as a whole, versus mainly to the arts community. This builds a powerful "public value" platform to enforce the work of the entire agency. MAC defines "public value" as services, programs and products valuable to Montanans and worthy of state and federal investment. As such, we garner input primarily from our underserved public (subject to geographic and economic barriers) and those who have the most influence over our agency: the political, education and economic leaders of our state. The end goal of our public value work is *increased accountability and responsiveness to elected officials in validating the public value of state and federal investments in the arts.*

This broader and more encompassing approach is evident in our mission: "The Montana Arts Council is the agency of state government established to develop the creative potential of all Montanans, advance education, spur economic vibrancy and revitalize communities through involvement in the arts."

Our 2014-2019 Operating Framework, launched in January 2014, was designed through a two-year process that captured opinions of over 3,500 Montanans through 29 input sources (see page 22 of the Framework.) We exceeded our expectations for feedback, and consider our approach successful -- measured by the extent of public engagement, the variety of approaches used to get that input, garnering good and new ideas, the diversity of involvement, as well as thoughtful reflections about our priorities and plans.

Instruments and methods used to reach Montanans for the 2014-2019 Framework:

- a) The first-ever [State of Arts Education](#) research was conducted in partnership with WESTAF on the status of arts education (313 of the 847 elementary, middle and secondary schools participated.)
- b) In a quest to branch out to a broader sector of Montana's public, MAC surveyed employees at [Oracle Technologies and Rocky Mountain Laboratories](#) to get insights into scientists' and technology folks' views on connections between art, creativity, innovation and their representative fields (104 responses.)
- c) We conducted the first-ever [Montana Arts and Healthcare Study](#) to doctors, nurses, health-care providers and administrators, arts organizations and artists, to delve into questions about the benefits of the integration of arts into the healthcare field. Respondents included 108 medical professionals as well as 490 artists and 59 arts organizations.
- d) The general public was polled on their attitude about public funding for the arts through a Montana Chamber of Commerce statewide-sponsored poll (450 responses.)
- e) 792 artists responded to our [Artists Study](#), and an additional 1,000 other individuals provided feedback, including arts organization staffs, boards, volunteers and arts educators.
- f) Public meetings were held with our four statewide arts service organizations to get feedback on the plan.
- g) To tap into the opinions of our political leadership we queried the governor's offices of Commerce, Tourism and Economic Development. We met with local political and tribal leaders and leaders in the Office of Public Instruction, our statewide advocacy group (the Montana Cultural Advocacy) and WESTAF (Western States Arts Federation).
- h) Legislative Listening Tours were held with dozens of legislative leaders, providing MAC with unique insight into what they think is of greatest public value in their communities, how their funding decisions are made, and what role creativity plays in Montana's future. (See [Listening Survey Tool](#).)
- i) Our council participated in the plan's development through a [Council Member Survey](#) about the legacy they would like to leave, and they formed a committee to fine-tune the plan.
- j) Nearly 100 Indian high schoolers on the Blackfeet Reservation in Browning, MT responded to our [Student Survey](#) about MAC and the value and meaning of the arts in their lives.
- k) The Emily Hall Tremain Foundation also surveyed Montana artists in their Marketplace Empowerment for Artists Initiative and shared the results with MAC; we integrated their findings into this plan.

All of our input methods focused primarily on underserved constituents as defined on page 2.

## **B.2. Quality of the Planning Process: *Recommendations and Priorities***

As a result of what we learned, three frames form the platform for our 2014-2019 Operating Framework:

### **1. *Economic Vitality***

- Artists identified as their predominant needs: career and market development assistance, training in marketing and business development skills, and creative partnership development.
- Arts organizations continue to value operational support funds, as well as professional development in fundraising, marketing, governance and community leadership issues.
- Montanans would like to see expanded technology used to overcome geographic isolation, provide services and lessen communication barriers.

### **2. *Arts Learning***

- Arts education funds and programs remain a strong need. The agency will continue to seek deeper integration of the arts into key state education programs.
- People want access to high-quality experiences that provide an opportunity for life-long learning in the arts, in addition to programs that provide *all the arts for students in all the schools*.

### 3. Public Value of the Arts

- Political leaders in Montana value efforts that produce return on investment, entrepreneurial spirit, economic growth, community trailblazers, hard-working partners, outstanding communities, creative minds and lasting legacies.
- Public value, defined as services, programs and products valuable to Montanans and worthy of state investment, is a key benchmark, remaining in the forefront of the arts council's goals.
- Montanans value the arts and believe they are important to their quality of life. MAC must continue to make a concerted effort to increase state funding by demonstrating the "return on investment."

#### **B.3. Quality of the Planning Process: Agency Response to Recommendations**

Over 3,500 Montanans provided input and feedback for the 2014-2019 plan. Our Operating Framework is a beacon for day-to-day and long-term operations. Now into our third year of the plan, we find it to be an extremely effective advocacy tool because its language is accessible to everyone.

When we completed our review of all sources of input, we presented a *draft* Operating Framework for public comment in September 2013 via MAC's *State of the Arts* newspaper (circulation 10,000) and an email campaign to state and local political leaders and leaders in education, commerce, tourism and economic development, as well as arts organizations and artists. In January 2014 the final version was implemented after feedback on the draft was incorporated. Here is the result to these responses:

### **CREATIVITY AT WORK: 2014-2019 OPERATING FRAMEWORK**

#### **A Framework for Economic Vitality:**

*Creativity at work boosts careers, economies and community vitality*

##### **Careers and Connections**

*Outcome We Want:* Healthy careers and vibrant businesses are built and enjoyed by artists, artisans and the staff and boards of arts organizations in every region of the state.

##### **Market Expansion**

*Outcome We Want:* Expanded markets and audience-building opportunities for artists and arts organizations include:

- Greater exposure to marketing outlets and resources
- Increased exhibition, arts participation and performance opportunities
- Expanded distribution channels and promotion opportunities

#### **A Framework for Arts Learning:**

*Provide access to quality arts education in order to develop the creative potential of Montanans of all ages*

##### **Life-long Learning**

*Outcome We Want:* Montanans acquire knowledge or skills in the arts and experience life-long learning through creative expression and exploration in the arts.

##### **Pre-school - Grade 12**

*Outcome We Want:* Montana Pre-school through Grade 12 students study a curriculum aligned with the Montana Board of Public Education's Standards for Arts.

#### **A Framework to Promote the Public Value of the Arts:**

*Convey the difference the arts make in the individual and collective lives of Montanans*

##### **Creativity and Innovation**

*Outcome We Want:* Montanans utilize the power of the arts as a catalyst to develop creative and innovative thinking in diverse ways and workplaces.

##### **The Three Rs – Relationships, Relevance, and Return on Investment**

*Outcome We Want:* Utilize the Three Rs (Relationships, Relevance and Return on Investment) to build bridges that connect the arts world to the worlds of politics, education, economics and civic engagement. A greater understanding of the return on investment of public dollars and statewide support for resources for all the arts will emerge.

## Challenges and Solutions

*Outcome We Want:* Innovative and creative solutions to many challenges and new opportunities facing Montana and its leaders will be arrived at through the involvement of arts organization leaders, artists, arts educators and artisans.

For each of these three key frames, in addition to stating the outcome we want, we strived to articulate our intentions for: 1) Why we do it 2) How we do it 3) How we evaluate it  
4) Consequences of failure 5) Indications of success

*One-hundred percent of the agency's programs and services are tied to the frames in our plan.* Our Operating Framework's overarching structure allows MAC to develop specific strategies and tactics to achieve our goals through a work plan done each year. This enables the agency's staff and council to be nimble as it responds to changing environments or changing priorities. Here is the [FY 17 Staff Work Plan](#) and our [FY16 Staff Work Plan Accomplishments](#)

**C. Quality of the Plan** (Addressed in the plan itself, at this link:  
[Operating Framework 2014-2019 \(Montana Arts Council's Strategic Plan\)](#))

### **D. 1. Accomplishments and Implementation: Significant programs, activities and accomplishments**

#### **Full Alignment of Agency Resources to MAC's Operating Framework (Strategic Plan)**

[MAC's 2014-2019 Operating Framework](#) is implemented by shaping *all* activities around the three strands that emerged from our research: Economic Vitality, Arts Learning and promoting the Public Value of the arts. On the back cover of our plan, you can see our roster of 86 partners who help us mobilize our work. Each agency program has been analyzed to make sure it ties to the priorities in the plan.

#### **Leadership Accomplishments in the Economic Vitality Frame of the Plan**

- *Artrepreneurs Reign.* With nearly 400 artists completing our Montana Artrepreneur Program curriculum since 2009, the Governor's office took note and helped cement a \$240,000 funding commitment for the program for the biennium (FY16-FY17) through the Department of Commerce. Since the program began, the agency has succeeded in raising additional public and private funds of \$850,000 to establish the MAP program as a national model for rural economic development. Results of this work are highlighted in section D.2.
- *Tourism Brings the Arts to the Table.* For the first time, MAC was treated as an equal partner in the development of a legislative bill initiated by the state's tourism industry to support culturally driven economic development, tourism and education in the last legislative session. The bill revised distribution of the state bed tax, re-allocating \$1.5 million to the Montana Arts Council and four other partners. The bill passed both houses of the legislature, but was sent back to committee, where it was tabled. Undaunted, MAC is working with tourism again in 2017 to pass a new version of the bill.  
In addition, MAC was the catalyst in brokering a partnership between the state's tourism division and "Lively Times," a monthly free entertainment tabloid in Montana, which has the state's best arts calendaring system. As a result, the state tourism office now contracts with "Lively Times" to produce the entire events calendar for their website.
- *Art of Leadership Governance Consultations.* This work is done by MAC's Business Development Specialist through face-to-face board and staff consultations to help arts organizations with strategic planning, and help address board, personnel and restructuring challenges. All received highest praise!

#### **Leadership Accomplishments in the Arts Learning Frame of the Plan**

*"A New Day for Arts Ed."* Montana will see the implementation of new arts standards in 2017. This achievement was led by the agency's arts education director, at the request of the state's Office of Public Instruction. There is no dedicated arts education staffer at OPI, and both agencies agreed the way to move new arts standards forward was to work together in an unprecedented collaboration. Careful relationship building with OPI and Salish Kootenai College on the Flathead Indian Reservation also led to the creation of The Montana Teacher Leaders in the Arts (MTLA), a statewide professional learning program that is



creating a powerful network of arts education leaders to foster more arts integration in Montana classrooms. Please see section **D.2**.

### **Leadership Accomplishments in the Public Value Frame of the Plan**

- MAC's [\*Public Value Partnerships\*](#) provide operating support grants for Montana's staffed arts organizations, but the agency actually treats these grants as advocacy contracts. They require that grantees be active partners to communicate the public value of our collective work. MAC asks grantees to set up an in-person, one-on-one meeting with their legislator(s) annually. This requirement is now used as a criterion for grant renewal funding. If meetings are not attempted, it negatively impacts a grantee's continued funding.

One of the most interesting results of this program comes in grantees' answers to questions that address *the Three Rs*, which form the core to build public value. Here are samples of [Model Answers](#)

1. How are you building *Relationships* with your supporters and constituency?
2. How are you creating greater *Relevance* to your public – how do you make greater connections between your work and your constituents?
3. If a legislator were to ask you "What is the *Return on investment* for this public funding you're receiving," how would you answer that by telling us a story?

We also weave the question, "How does what you do produce public value" into our grant applications and reports for Artist Innovation Awards, Cultural Trust and Strategic Investment Grants.

### **Leadership Accomplishments in "Spreading the Word" that impacts all frames of the plan.**

- "[State of the Arts](#)," MAC's free 20-page newspaper, is published quarterly and has a circulation of more than 10,000 in print and another 1,000 online. Our constituents tell us it is the best thing we do.
- MAC's new [website](#) and a vibrant Facebook presence get rave reviews from constituents.
- Bi-weekly eNews bulletins are sent to 3,500 artists, arts educators, arts organizations and public art contacts.
- [A two-minute video](#) about the value of the arts was produced for the gubernatorial inauguration.
- MAC partners with Lee Enterprises, the MT Tourism Office and MT Historical Society to produce an annual 146-page booklet, [Montana's Cultural Treasures Guide](#), with statewide circulation of 100,000.
- Online MAC publications for rural arts organizations address participation-building, fund-raising strategies and Montana market research. "[The Art of Leadership](#)" also ties in governance strategies.
- A series of [webinars](#) have been hosted on topics such as social media, telling your story and designing accessible websites and the most popular of all time, independent contractors vs. employees!
- And finally, one of the biggest achievements of the past decade was the implementation of a successful inter-relational database (Donor Perfect) that actually syncs with our online grant system (Foundant).

## **D.2. Accomplishments and Implementation: Arts learning**

### **Arts Learning Significant Accomplishment—New Funding and Partnership Approach**

The arts council has not been successful in achieving major budget increases from the legislature in recent years as they are limiting any increases to 3%. As a result, we developed a wish list for arts education and went to the Office of Public Instruction to ask for their help in funding these initiatives. The result was an unprecedented partnership that produced the accomplishments below.

### **Arts Learning Significant Accomplishment—Revision and Adoption of New Arts Standards**

In fall of 2014, MAC and OPI entered into an agreement to work together towards the goal of getting [new arts standards](#) adopted. Originally written in 1999, they had never been revised. In July 2016, MAC and OPI celebrated the formal adoption of new standards. MAC's contribution to the process included:

- Distribution of an online educator survey and 11 live focus groups to gather input on what could be improved upon in new standards.
- Recruitment of a team of 25 arts educators to write new standards.
- Facilitation of a three-day meeting of the writing team to create the first draft of the new standards.
- Soliciting input from the OPI Office of Indian Education and Indian educators to ensure the new standards included Montana's Indian Education for All (IEFA).

- MAC’s arts education director participated as a member of the Negotiated Rulemaking Committee convened by OPI to review the draft standards and accompanying economic impact survey.
- MAC’s arts education director engaged in a planning process with OPI to identify resources and tools to help educators implement the new standards that take effect July 1, 2017.

### **Arts Learning Significant Accomplishment—Montana Teacher Leaders in the Arts**

In the fall of 2014, MAC and OPI also entered into another partnership to address the lack of professional learning opportunities for K-12 educators in the arts. MAC and OPI deliberated carefully over the structure of this program, with the shared goal of benefiting rural teachers and teachers in Reservation schools.

[Montana Teacher Leaders in the Arts](#) (MTLA) uses a blended-learning model that starts with a nine-day summer arts learning institute at Salish Kootenai College, the tribal college on the Flathead Reservation. School-year activities for cohort members include: 1) execution of an arts learning field project; 2) a series of four arts-learning webinars; 3) a monthly online professional learning community; and 4) a weekend gathering at the end of the school year. The program chooses a cohort of teachers with equitable representation across the state and a balance of urban, rural and Reservation teachers. The first cohort of 16 “Teacher Leaders” completed the program in April 2016, and is now providing professional learning opportunities to other teachers in their schools and regions in the form of coaching, workshops and webinars. The second cohort is in progress.

### **Arts Learning Significant Accomplishment—Convening Arts Education Leaders**

In April 2015 MAC offered our first Teaching Artist Weekend, a professional learning opportunity featuring workshops led by master teacher artists. Over 40 teaching artists attended. In September 2016, MAC and OPI will host the first ever Statewide Arts Education Leadership Summit for up to 150 people to celebrate the adoption of new arts standards and spotlight best practices in arts learning. These convenings are an outgrowth of careful and deliberate network-building over the past several years in support of furthering arts education in the state.

### **Arts Learning Significant Accomplishment—Artists in Schools and Communities**

In addition to the help from OPI to achieve the accomplishments cited above, MAC continues to support hands-on learning in the arts through our Artists in Schools and Communities program (AISC). AISC provides project funding for artist visits and residencies in K-12 schools and community organizations. Projects cover a range of ages, from school-aged to adult, as well as a range of community sizes. This program reaches two out of every five school children in the state. One funded application in FY17 came from a one-room schoolhouse along the Rocky Mountain Front. Two other projects are happening in detention facilities. In early 2016, MAC relaunched an expanded, more user-friendly, Artists in Schools and Communities Registry and began offering a webinar for applicants interested in applying for AISC funding.

## **D.3. Accomplishments and Implementation: *Underserved Communities***

Accessibility to the state’s frontier populations does, indeed, present challenges. Primarily, it is about scale. Nearly half of all Montanans reside within really rural areas, and often with 30 to 200 miles between nearby population centers. *Every* program and service designed by the agency is geared toward rural, underserved populations. (Of course, many of these are easily accessible by our urban folks, too.)

**Underserved Accomplishment: *The Montana Artrepreneur Program (MAP)*.** MAC’s foremost accomplishment in the Economic Vitality frame is our work with artists in our Montana Artrepreneur Program, targeted to rural, underserved areas of the state. To date, over 400 artists have participated.

Designed in 2009, MAP assists Montana’s rural contemporary and traditional visual artists to develop entrepreneurial skills that build their art businesses and increase their income. Truly a grassroots effort, [MAP](#) is founded upon the power of networks. During the past seven years, eight to ten cohorts of artists are in training each year across the state. A cohort consists of a group of six to twelve artists committed to a curriculum taught in monthly meetings over the year and an annual Showcase and Sale. Through the program, artists develop a [“Toolbox”](#) of 35 elements that help bring them to “market readiness.” MAC also

designed a “Train the Trainer” program to expand the number of coaches who could lead these cohorts. Twenty-seven coaches have now completed the training!

The proof is in the pudding! A longitudinal study was recently completed for artists’ sales across all years of the program. Between 2009 and 2014, artists who completed their certification had an average *net sales increase of 650% and out-of-state sales rose 87%*. Here is the [executive summary](#) of the analysis.

MAC has garnered private and public funding of \$850,000 to support our MAP investment, including the Montana Dept. of Commerce, the Emily Hall Tremain Foundation of New Haven, CT, the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture’s Rural Communities Development Initiative, and LINC -- Leveraging Investments in Creativity Foundation, NYC. The USDA funding (\$175,000) was made possible through a rural partnership with the Ravalli County Economic Development Authority in Hamilton, MT.

We were honored to see MAP recognized in the National Governor’s Association’s publications on economic development, [Arts and the Economy](#) (page 12) and [New Engines of Growth](#) (page 11).

**Underserved Accomplishment:** *Arts Learning* grants of up to \$10,000 for first-time applicants, and Class C schools or small rural schools supervised by a county superintendent, are only required to provide 1/3 of the total project budget, with the other 2/3 provided by MAC, rather than a 1:1 match.

These grants are some of the most effective vehicles the agency has to reach into deeply rural Montana, as these partners serve schools statewide in many rural towns and on Indian Reservations that we would never reach otherwise. One example is the Waterworks Art Museum in eastern Montana’s Miles City, which serves the entire eastern third of our state with their travelling kiln artist residency program. We featured this organization in our [NEA 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary video](#). In addition, our new Teacher Leaders in the Arts program was a boon to underserved school teachers, with over ¾ of attendees from rural Montana.

**Underserved Accomplishment:** *Montana’s Statewide Arts Service Organizations (SSOs)* are unique to our state, and in lieu of an established culture of local arts agencies, are formed by disciplines like the MT Association of Symphony Orchestras, MT Dance Arts Assn., MT Performing Arts Consortium and the Montana Art Gallery Directors Assn. Each of these SSOs pushes their resources deep into our rural Montana. MAC’s funding to them helps reach over 50 rural arts organizations we would otherwise miss.

**Underserved Accomplishment:** *State of the Arts Newspaper and eNews subscriptions* reach close to 14,000 Montanans in 94% of all towns on Montana’s map! These publications connect us all as one big family under the Big Sky, especially important for people living in isolation. [State of the Arts](#) also involves the most important partnership we have, which is with “Lively Times,” Montana’s monthly entertainment tabloid, which publishes our paper. We also utilize book and CD reviews “Lively Times” writes for their own publication and their online [Arts Calendar](#), while we produce the rest of the paper ourselves. We also have a [Native News](#) feature each issue that connects us to Indian Country.

**Underserved Accomplishment:** *ADA and Accessibility* is elevated each year in importance as part of our grantee requirements. For instance, ADA compliance was 10% of operating support grantees’ score for the FY 16-19 cycle. For this grant cycle, contracts were not issued until grantees met [Website ADA Compliance Benchmarks](#), developed with the counsel of Beth Bienvenu, NEA Accessibility Director.

#### **D.4. Accomplishments/Implementation: Metrics and Measuring Progress**

MAC’s grants and programs reach an incredible 95% of towns on Montana’s map, which speaks to how thoroughly MAC impacts the state! Program and service evaluations also fully integrate the voice of the underserved because they are our primary focus. Evaluation methods are year-round, embedded in every program and service we offer. Feedback often centers on tactical areas, such as finding more ways to serve writers and performers, working more deeply in Indian Country or expanding our website resources, to name a few. Following each online grant application and each annual reporting period, MAC asks our grantees to provide opinions about agency priorities, responsiveness/helpfulness, as well as how they found the application or reporting processes, and we address these needs internally to improve wherever necessary.



[Staff Annual Work Plan](#) tactics are built to have clear performance measures and outcomes. These Plans and [Staff Work Plan Accomplishments](#) are published online every fiscal year.

*To assess how effectively our public value message is getting through to legislators*, staff analyzes reporting by grantees, who are asked to meet annually, one-on-one in person, with their local legislators and their U.S. Congressional staff to thank them for their work and discuss the value of the arts organization's work in the community. This helps establish real relationships outside of the legislative session, and is much more effective than writing letters or sending emails. Grantees' reports on these meetings help gauge how effectively legislators understand the valuable roles the arts play in their community and where barriers still exist. It lets MAC know where we need to do more, what message might work best and who is best to deliver that message, vital for legislative session preparation.

*The MAP program* engages an outside professional evaluator annually to assess economic, educational and personal artistic growth in both snapshot and longitudinal [studies](#) of rural and underserved artists.

*Office-on-the-Road* launched five staff members on three 3-day trips to the far corners of the state in 2016, visiting seven rural underserved communities (including one Indian Reservation), in addition to our largest city, Billings. During the 3,000-mile trek, MAC had an opportunity to hear what was working and what needed improvement. One of the major outcomes of the Billings meeting was a serious change we subsequently made to our Cultural Trust granting process, making it more transparent to the public through our website, with plans to televise the grant panels through the state's legislative television station this fall.

### **Arts Education Metrics**

MAC Artists in the Schools and Communities grant program engages in an in-depth evaluation process that includes typical statistical data, as well as information such as the project having:

- a) Clear learning objectives;
- b) Detailed activities that meet objectives;
- c) Effective processes to assess whether students met learning objectives;
- d) Description of ways to minimize barriers;
- e) How the residency integrates into curriculum;
- f) Learning objectives developed through collaborations between the artist and teacher.

*Metrics Reporting Requirements for All Grantees* include total numbers benefitting for youth, rural individuals, artists, and cumulative totals of all people benefitting, cities and counties, out-of-staters and for organizations, the number of paid admissions and free public admissions.

*Outcomes Not Met.* In our most recent year, 170 of 194 tactics (88%) in the [Staff Work Plan](#) were completed as planned. Those that weren't completed were caused by purposeful shifts in priorities due to limited staff capacity or transitions, and limited funding. The challenges have been met head-on, with terrific new people on board. In addition, as of the writing of this application, the agency is in mid-search process for the selection of a new executive director to replace Arni Fishbaugh, who retires in October 2016.

### ***In Closing, MAC's Signature Achievement of the Past Two Decades and Our Thanks.***

The most remarkable accomplishment of the last 20 years came about in 2016 when the Senator who attempted to eviscerate and eliminate the agency in 1997 became not only our advocate, but sponsored the tourism bill that would have given the agency \$1.5 million in new funding each year, had the bill passed. This turn-around took enormous effort in relationship-building and agency transformation during the interim years. It also underscores the effectiveness of MAC's public value work and why we never give up.

MAC thanks the NEA panel for what we know will be your thoughtful reading of this narrative. We hope we have brought to life for you our home and the vision for our agency, which is: "Montana is known far and wide as 'The Land of Creativity,' where the arts are essential to the creativity, imagination and entrepreneurship that make Big Sky Country the very best place on earth to live, learn, work and play."

The Montana Arts Council hopes you'll come to visit soon!